

PLOUGHING A ROCK NO. 2977

**A SERMON
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***"Shall horses run upon the rock? will one plow there with oxen?"
Amos 6:12***

THESE two questions are evidently Oriental proverbial expressions. Proverbs have always been used by the wisest of men. Solomon not only spoke and wrote a great many, but he also made a considerable collection of those uttered by others. We find, in the writings of such notable thinkers as Socrates, and Pliny, and Aristotle, an abundance of short, pithy sentences, many of which can be used as proverbs. Proverbs have great force in them, because they are condensed wisdom. They are generally most convincing, it is hardly ever possible to answer or controvert them. They carry truth home as an arrow has often been known to carry death to the person aimed at, for they strike, they stick, they penetrate, they wound.

Our Lord Jesus very frequently made use of proverbs, nor was he singular in so doing. The prophets of old constantly employed them, and here, in our text, we see Amos—who, from his occupation as a herdsman and gatherer of sycamore fruit, was probably more familiar with their use than some others of the prophets were—puts together two proverbs which were commonly used to signify that men do not, as a rule, continue to labor in vain, and spend their strength for nought. Wise men do not send their horses to run upon the rocks, and they do not send their oxen to plough where all their toil would be wasted, “Shall horses run upon the rock?” will one plough there with oxen?” The answer implied is, “Certainly not,” and it meant that, if a thing cannot be done, it is not worth doing if it can, it will be well for us not to attempt to do it. Our text may have two bearings, first, *upon men*, and secondly, *upon God*.

I. First, WITH REGARD TO MEN, they are not usually so foolish as to try to plough a rock, yet many are as foolish as that in moral and spiritual matters.

I want to give you three or four illustrations of this fact. The first is, that *many persons have tried to find the way of safety and pleasure in the way of sin*. Many a man has sought to get rich by injustice, possibly, he has succeeded to a certain extent, but as a general rule, it is notorious that ill-gotten riches are generally ill-spent and bring a curse upon their possessors.

Some have thought that, if they indulged their passions, they would have great enjoyment. Although their fathers warned them that such a sin would be like self-destruction, and would make their whole life sad, they have not believed it would be so, and they have tried to plough this hard rock of sin, and to find lasting pleasure therein. There are hundreds and thousands of men, who are pursuing the way which is not good—and they know it is not good, yet they foolishly continue in it because they conceive it to be the path of pleasure, nor can you beat that false notion out of their heads, do what you may.

On the contrary, they turn round upon you, and call you a “Puritan” because you object to their style of living. Possibly, they revile you as a hypocrite because you point out the evils of the way in which they are walking. Yet, if they would but think at all seriously, they must perceive that the way of sin cannot lead to happiness. It is absolutely inconceivable that God, who made the whole universe, should have arranged that the terminus of sin should be heaven, or should have made the path of evil lead to joy and peace. The Judge of all the earth cannot have put a premium upon wickedness, in the long run, it must be proved that sin brings forth sorrow, and that the path of right is the path of peace.

Yet many will not see that it must be so, and they continue, even to the bitter end of life, to plough that rock, breaking the ploughshare, wearing out the ox, and themselves dying a death of miserable disappointment, which, if they had not been arrant fools, they would never have had to endure, for they would never have attempted so hopeless a task as that of trying to find any real pleasure in the ways of sin. As well might you sow the sea with salt, and expect to reap from it a harvest of golden sheaves—as well might you scatter firebrands, and expect to gather from them the cooling streams that flow from the mountain spring, as live in sin, and expect to receive happiness as the result of doing so. Cease, O sons of men, such an act of madness as the ploughing of this rock must ever be!

Others are attempting another equally absurd task. They are *hoping to find real joy in pursuits which are laudable in themselves, but which are entirely of this world.* Did you ever read the book called “The Mirage of Life”? It is a book which is well worth everyone’s reading. The author gives, in sets of pictures, the life of the man of pleasure, the life of the courtier, the life of the philosopher, the life of the statesman, the life of the warrior, and so on, with a very fair selection of facts from the lives of such men, with the object of showing that, although each one of them was eminent in his own line of things, and apparently successful in that line, yet they all failed to find the precious jewel of solid satisfaction.

Most of them lived in a sort of perpetual weariness, and when, at last, they died, and their eyes were opened, they found that their pretty dreams had all vanished, and that the reality, when they beheld it, was dreary indeed.

There have been men—perhaps some of you have known them—who have had more wealth than you and I would care to count, yet they have thought themselves poor, and so they really were, for they were incapable of enjoying the riches which they had amassed. There have been men who have been crowned with laurel, who have had all sorts of honors heaped upon them, yet when a friend has wished them a happy new year, they have said, “Then it had need be a very different year from any that we have ever yet experienced.”

The high places of the world, like the mountain tops, are glassy with icy dangers, and they are cold with discontent. Many try to clamber up to them, and a few reach the summit, but others perish in the crevasses. Yet those who reach the summit often envy those who are in the vale below, and those in the valley envy those on the heights, for beneath yon moon, there is no contentment to be found in earthly things either in the peasant’s hut or the monarch’s palace. The man, whose arm is not long enough to grasp that which lies in the land beyond the stars, will have to live and die without attaining to perfect satisfaction.

Man, it is not here below that God has placed that which you want. The bread for your souls must come from heaven. That which can satisfy your immortal spirit must be divine, like the Creator who made you. God alone can satisfy the cravings of your soul. Cease, then, to toil, and tug, and fret, and fume, and waste your time and strength in seeking happiness in these bubbles of earth. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,” in so far as you need them, but as for seeking them first, plough that rock no longer, for it will yield you no return for all your toil.

Men of another sort are satisfied that the things of this world are not sufficient to render a man perfectly happy, so *they have religious thoughts of a certain form.* They believe that they are very good, and excellent, and they mean to make themselves still better, and so to get perfect peace by feeling that they are what they ought to be and have done what they ought to have done.

I remember when I ploughed that hard rock, and entertained the hope of getting a very fine crop off it, but I woke, one morning, to discover that the rock would not yield even the moss or lichen of comfort to me, there was nothing on its surface that could bring me any contentment. Self-righteousness is a great cheat. The man who gets most comfort out of it simply gets that comfort because he is ignorant, if he knew himself, and knew God’s law, and knew the demands of inflexible justice, he would fling upon the nearest dunghill that self-righteousness of his, which looks like fair white linen, but which really is, in God’s sight, nothing but filthy rags.

O sirs, ye cannot find your way to heaven by your own works, for the only way to heaven by works is perfectly to keep the law of God, and you have broken that law already. You must present this matchless vase, flawless and entire, at the gates of glory if you would be saved by works, but you have already shattered it in a thousand pieces, how can you hope to mend it? That is impossible, the hope of salvation by a perfect life is over, and you must each one feel that your life has been imperfect already.

Some hope that they will get perfect peace by the way of ceremonies. Many people tell us that we are living in a very enlightened age, but I am inclined to think that Carlyle was uncommonly near the mark when he said that “the United Kingdom contains about thirty millions of people—*mostly fools*,” for it does seem as if people nowadays, were fools to a very large extent. For instance, a man says that if we will come and confess our sins to him, he can forgive us in the name of God, and that he can, by sprinkling a few drops of water upon a child, and uttering certain words, transform an heir of wrath into an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, and that, if we come to what he calls an altar, he will give us the very body and blood of Christ to eat and drink.

Well, when I was young, I thought that anybody who talked like that ought to be served like the gypsies who were put in prison for taking sixpences from silly servants, and pretending to tell their fortunes, and in later years, I have been sometimes surprised that the law has not been put in motion against these gentlemen, for certainly, the imposture which they seek to foist upon us is a far more terrible one than that of the fortune-telling gypsies.

The so-called “priest” has no power to forgive sins, or to change the nature of the child he sprinkles, or to offer the sacrifice of the mass. There is nothing more in him than there is in anybody else, and let him talk as loudly as he may, his pretensions are utterly vain and worthless. If you trust to him, the result to you will be the same as it has been to tens of thousands before you, for you will find that all the ceremonies which men have invented, yea, and all the rites that God Himself has given, cannot bring healing to a soul diseased, or hush the tumult of an awakened conscience, or bring the soul into a state of conscious reconciliation with the Most High.

O sirs, you may be sprinkled, and confirmed, and immersed, and go to the communion table, and do I know not what beside, yea, you may travel along seven thousand leagues of ceremonialism, but you will be just as uneasy at the end as you were at the beginning. That is not the way of peace, neither will God make it to be so. It is ploughing a rock, and no harvest can possibly come of it.

Some are trying the equally impossible task of *being saved by Jesus Christ when they shall have prepared themselves for Him*. In other words, they talk about being saved by Christ, but in their heart of hearts, they do not think that Christ can save them till they have reached a certain standard of excellence. Now we know, from the Scriptures, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save His people from their sins, and He will do it from first to last, or not at all. He will be the Alpha and the Omega—the A and the Z of salvation’s alphabet, or else He will have nothing to do with it, yet thousands of hearers of the Gospel are constantly saying, “We will believe in Jesus when we feel our sins more—when we feel more repentance—when we have done this, and told that, and experienced the other.”

Ah, sirs, this plan of bringing Christ in at the fag end of the work, after you have accomplished the first part of it yourselves, is a most foolish mistake, and a fatal one too. It is like setting oxen to plough a rock. Let me ask you—Are you any better than you used to be? You have been trying, for a long while, to make yourselves ready for Christ, are you any more ready than you were at the first? Has it never struck you that Hart’s lines are true?

*“If you tarry till you’re better,
You will never come at all.”*

Thus I have shown you how the text can be applied with regard to men.

II. Now, secondly, I want to show you how these proverbs can be applied WITH REGARD TO GOD, “Shall horses run upon the rocks? will one plough there with oxen?”

God does not always continue to do that which, after a certain period, turns out to be unprofitable. Dear friends, there are some of you—I pray God to grant that there may not be any of you of whom this will remain true, but it is at present true that *there are some of you to whom the Gospel has come in vain.* Up till now, so far as you are concerned, the Gospel plough has only gone across a rock, the truth preached in your hearing has not gained an entrance into your heart.

Oh, how many come and hear us preach merely that they may compare us with other preachers! They pass certain criticisms upon our mode, and manner, and matter. We do not know, and we do not care, what they say, but the point that really concerns us is that we cannot get the Gospel plough into them, we cannot make them feel, and repent, and believe. A great master of the art of preaching once said, when his congregation complimented him on having delivered a fine discourse, “There is another sermon lost.” He did not want his hearers to praise his discourse, he wanted them to feel the power of the truth which he had preached to them, and so do we.

But there are some hearers into whom we do not know how to get the truth. We may put it, first in one way, and then in another way, sometimes, pathetically, and at other times, we may make use of a little humor, we may denounce or allure, but we are equally foiled in whatever way we attempt to reach them. We cannot get the plough in where we want it to go, and if ever the share does seem to make a little impression, it only produces a slight surface scratch. Some of you have had a good many of those scratches. You have thought, “When I get out of this place, I will go home and pray,” but you have not done so, or if you have prayed, your seriousness has soon vanished, and the impression made upon you in the service has expended itself in that prayer.

What is worst of all, in some of you, *God's dealing with you, in the preaching of the Gospel, has developed the hardness of your hearts.* It has made others realize how hard they are, and truth to tell, it has really hardened them. Ploughing does not harden rocks, but preaching does harden sinners if the Gospel does not reach their hearts, and of all hard-hearted men, the hardest are those who have been hardened in the fire of the Gospel. If you want to find a heart that is as hard as steel, you must look for one that has passed through the furnace of divine love, and has been made aware of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, but has rejected the truth that has been made known to it.

This hardening of heart is not the fault of the ploughshares which have been used, and *with some of you, God has used a great many.* There is a man here, who used to be ploughed by God when he was a child, and the ploughshares employed then were his mother’s tears. He cannot forget them, even now, as I bring them to his memory, he feels as if he must weep as he did when he was a child. Ah, my friend, that mother of yours is in heaven now, but if she could look down upon her son and tears could be shed in heaven, what cause she would have to weep over you! She prayed for you when you were nestling in her bosom, and she took you to the house of God from your very early days. You can remember her very look when she used to speak to you about Jesus when you were quite a little child, and perhaps you remember her dying request that you would follow her to heaven, but that ploughshare—one of God’s best—has never cut into your rocky heart yet, and you still remain as hard as ever you were.

Since that time, God has tried you with the ploughshare of personal sickness. You have not always been such a strong man as you are today. Time was when you lay very near the gates of death, and you trembled at the prospect before you? Do you remember when the fever seized you, or when you thought the cholera had claimed you as its victim? You did tremble then, and you made many vows, which all proved to be lies, and you made a profession of repentance, but it was mere profession, and though you appeared, just for a little while, to be touched, and those who were around you, who had prayed for you, hoped that at last the ploughshare had entered into you, they found that you rose up from that bed of sickness worse than you were before.

Since then, God has used another sharp ploughshare upon you—the conversion of some of those who are very near and dear to you. You were not at all pleased when your wife came home a converted woman, but you could not help feeling it, and when your sister wrote and told you that she was rejoicing in Christ as her Savior, you could not pour ridicule upon the letter, and as you read it, it brought tears to

your eyes. You quickly wiped them away and said that you were not such a fool as to trouble about so absurd a matter, yet it was not easy for you to forget the emotion which the news had caused. Possibly, your own dear child, whom you love very much, has made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet you do not know anything, experientially, about such faith as that. This is a very sharp ploughshare, and none can think lightly of it but those who are unaware of its operation. To have your relatives and friends converted, and to be yourself left out of the happy circle of blessing, ought to make you think seriously about this matter.

Another ploughshare has gone across your rocky heart from the fact that some of your old companions are dead. One was buried this week, was he not? You used to drink and smoke with him, but there will be no more pipes and beer on a Sunday night for you two. You know right well that he died without the fear of God in his heart, and you also know that you are living in the same sad and perilous condition. It gave you quite a shock when someone said to you, "Old Tom is dead."

You have also seen several of your business friends die. There was that clerk who was in the office with you a little while ago, he is gone, and you have been called to occupy his place. Death has come awfully near you again and again. You have been like a soldier on the field of battle, who saw the ranks on every side of him mown down, yet he still lived on.

God's plough has been at work with you, He has been trying, by these striking providential dealings, to touch your hard heart, but it has not yielded yet. Do you think that God means to keep on ploughing you to no effect? If you do, you are wonderfully mistaken, for the oxen will not always plough upon this rock, and when it comes to this pass, that neither can love melt you, nor terrors subdue you, God will say, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone," and when God says that, your doom will be sealed. May God grant that he may never have to say that concerning any whom I am now addressing!

I have thus shown you that you have been like a piece of granite rock, untouched by all the different ploughshares which have been tried upon you. There is another thought that you must not forget, and that is, *you have wearied the workers*. I pity the poor oxen that have to plough a rock, they plod on and on, and all their toil is wasted. The hardest form of labor is that which produces no result.

I remember being in a military prison, where they punish the men by making them carry cannon balls from one end of the yard to another and bring them back again—a very senseless practice. The sergeant who accompanied me said, "When we let the men carry the balls from this end of the yard, to make them into a pyramid at the other end, there was some kind of amusement in the task, so the rule was made that the man must carry the ball from this end of the yard, and bring it back again, and his toil seems to be so altogether fruitless that it becomes a double punishment to him."

It is certainly a very great trial for a man to have to work for nothing, and to feel that all he is doing will result in nothing. There are some of us, who have had to do with you unconverted folk, and we have sometimes felt that we have been very hardly used—we oxen that have to plough such hard rocks as you are. The first part of my text says, "Shall horses run upon the rock?" I remember going over a smooth, rocky place in the Alps, which is called Hell-place, because it is so very slippery. Well, horses could not be expected to run over rocks like those, and it is not surprising that they sometimes trip, and if the preacher occasionally trips, it is little wonder when he has such rocks as those to go over.

George Herbert says that the sins of hearers sometimes make the preacher trip, and so it is. There is often, in the hearer, that which makes the preacher speak amiss. I remember pleading one night here with all my soul, and I said, "If some of you, who are listening to me, never mean to accept Christ as your Savior, do not continue to sit in this place, and hear the Gospel, but go away, and let somebody, who will accept Him, occupy your seat."

I did not think that one of my hearers would take me at my word, but there was one, over whom I have never ceased to lament, and for whom I still pray, who says that he will never come here again, because he is one of those who will never receive Christ, and though he would still like to hear me preach, he will never occupy another person's place. It was a mistake on my part to say just what I did, but I do not think I should have tripped like that if the rock had not been so hard and smooth.

It is hard for a horse to have to run upon such a rock as that, and it is hard for the oxen to keep on ploughing there. I have had over twenty years of this kind of ploughing upon some of you, and I have made nothing of you yet. Thank God, there are not many of your sort, but there is still a remnant left of the old Park-Streeters, who were “almost persuaded” then, and they are “almost persuaded” still, and I am “almost persuaded” that I shall never be able to do them any good. It seems to me that there is nothing which I can say that will ever reach their hearts, or else, surely, it would have reached them before now.

I am always glad when I hear that some other preacher attracts them, and that they are listening to him with interest, for as long as they get saved, I shall not mind how it is done. Still, it is hard lines for us to have to preach for twenty years to some of you, and to have all that labor for nothing. If anybody would teach me how to preach better, I would gladly go to school again, and learn how to get at some of your hearts. If they would teach me how to speak in such a vulgar style that I should lose my reputation, but be blessed to the saving of your souls, I would willingly fling my reputation to the winds, or if I could learn the art of oratory, I would go and sit at the feet of Cicero or Demosthenes, if I could but get at your superfine hearts, that want such fine words before they will be touched. But I fear that it is the oxen’s fate to go on ploughing, and ploughing, and ploughing, and to get weary with the labor, and yet to see no result of it all.

One other thing that I want you to recollect—you who remain unconverted after all this effort—and that is, *if the same labor, which has been lost upon you, has been used elsewhere, it might have been profitable*. Christ said, concerning Bethsaida and Chorazin, a very wonderful thing, which I do not fully understand, but which I absolutely believe, “If the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” It is a very extraordinary thing that God would send the Gospel to men who do not get any good out of it, and not send it to people who would have got good out of it.

There are people, possibly, even in London, certainly in other parts of the earth, who would have been converted if they had heard the Gospel as much as you have done, yet you have heard it, and have not been converted. That same digging about and dunging, that would have made other trees bring forth much fruit, has been used in vain upon you, for you have brought forth no fruit, and you have stood there, and occupied a plot of ground, which a better tree might have occupied. You have cumbered the ground, do you think that God will always allow you to do that?

Have you—who live in the country, and have a large orchard—have you a tree that has borne no fruit for many years? I am sure that, if so, you mean to have it cut down before long, and God means to have some of you cut down, and that ere long, it may be. I tremble even as I speak to you thus, for I may be a prophet foretelling the destruction of your soul. May God, in His infinite mercy, grant that you may repent ere His axe of judgment falls upon you!

Any man in his senses, when he finds that the rock will not break, gives up ploughing it. The ancient proverb says, “Will one plough *there* with oxen?” and God, though infinitely merciful, is equally wise, and if, after the use of means which are blessed elsewhere, any heart still remains hard, He may fairly say, “I have done with it, I give it up to its natural rockiness, and so let it continue for ever.” That is the end of the matter, and a terrible end it is, and I do not know anything more that I can say about it. I have preached the Gospel thousands of times, and I have nothing to preach but the Gospel, but these people will not have that, so what more can I say to them?

A man came to me the other day and asked me to pray for him. He was one to whom I had many times explained the Gospel, and after I had again done so, he said to me, “Will you pray for me, sir?” I said, “No, I will not.” He asked, “Why not?” and I replied, “Do you want me to ask God to save you apart from the Gospel? I have told you the Gospel again and again, will you accept it? If you will not, I shall not ask God to save you, how can I do so? I cannot expect Him to save you if you will not have the Gospel. If you will have it, that will save you. If you will not have it, you will be lost, and it is no use for me to pray for you.”

There I had to leave the matter so far as that man was concerned, but let me say this much to God's people—You see that *we* cannot do anything with this rock. The oxen are quite tired out with their useless labor, so let us pray to God to turn that rock into good soil. It needs a miracle to be wrought, and only God can work it. Let us unite our prayers, and cry to God, "O Lord, thou didst change our rocky hearts into good soil, where the good seed could enter, and germinate, and grow, change these rocks, we beseech thee!" Here is the reason for our prayer meetings, and for our private intercession. We can do nothing with these rocky hearts, so let us turn to God, who can do everything.

Then I may add that, if you will pray God to change these rocky hearts, I will go on preaching to them. The weary ox will go on ploughing again, hard as it has found the work for these twenty years and more. If you will pray, I will preach. If you pray God to make the work friable, and break it up, I will plough it again, and I should not wonder if the ploughshare gets into some of them at last, so that there may yet be a golden harvest to God's honor and glory.

Let me put the plough in one minute more. The greatest rock breaking plough that I know of is the one that broke me up. If that will not do it, I do not know of any other that will. When Christ died upon the cross, among other wonderful things that happened, we read that "the rocks rent, and the graves were opened." Ah, it was a dying Christ that rent the rocks! Sinner, listen once more to—

*"The old, old story
Of Jesus and His love."*

Thou hast offended and grieved your God, and your God is just, and must punish you for your wrongdoing, but in order that He may not punish you, He has taken upon Himself your nature, and come into this world to suffer in the sinner's stead, and borne what was due to human sin in His own body on the tree. Out of pure love to those who were His enemies, out of love to those hearts that are so hard that they will not love Him, out of love to those who have, perhaps, for fifty years rejected and despised Him—for love, for the sake of love alone, He died upon the tree, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." And now, if you will trust Him, you shall at once have the pardon of all your sins. If you will trust Him, you shall be—

*"To the great Father's bosom pressed,
Once for all a child confessed."*

You shall be cleansed in a moment, and accepted and saved for ever, if you do trust the incarnate, dying, risen, glorified Redeemer. God grant that this ploughshare of the cross may touch you! Law and terrors, I know full well, do not affect some men, but almighty love—will not that affect them? God grant that it may, and unto Him shall be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

AMOS 6:1-8 AND 7:1-6

Amos was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. His words are rugged, but sometimes he rises to sublimity. His expressions are somewhat dark, and not readily to be understood, but when we learn the meaning of them, we perceive that they are full of deep, earnest, solemn warning and instruction.

Amos Chapter 6. Verse 1. *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!*

It was a time of great sin, and also of great judgment, yet there were some in Zion who were quite at ease under all that was happening. No sense of sin grieved them, no thought of coming judgment alarmed them. What did they care if the nation went to rack and ruin? What did it signify to them that God was angry with His people? They were atheists, or at least, they acted as if they were. Whatever might happen, they would run the risk of it. "Woe," says God, to all such people as these, and when the Lord says "Woe" to anyone, it is indeed woe, for He never speaks thus without cause.

2. *Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?*

The Lord points to other cities which had been destroyed—to Calneh, and Hamath, and Gath, which He had smitten because of the sin of the people who had lived there, and He says, "Ye that dwell at Jerusalem, and ye that live at Samaria, do not imagine that ye will escape the consequences of your sin. I was able to reach the inhabitants of these proud cities, despite their strong fortifications and their powerful armies, and I can reach you also." So, when we look back upon the judgments of God upon guilty men, we may conclude that no sinner has any right to think that he shall escape. The proudest and mightiest have been brought down by God, and so will men, who dare to resist the Most High, continue to be humbled, even to the world's end.

3. *Ye that put far away the evil day,—*

Ye who say, "There is time enough yet. Let us see a little more of life, why need we be in a hurry to seek salvation?" "Ye that put far away the evil day,"—

3. *And cause the seat of violence to come near;*

For, when men try to postpone thoughts about "the judgment" which is to follow "after death," they are generally the more eager to indulge in sin. They say, "There is time enough yet," because they want a longer period for yet greater indulgence in sinful ways. The Lord vies "Woe" to all such people as these.

4. *That lie upon beds of ivory,—*

They were men of wealth, who spent their money upon all manner of luxuries while the poor of the land were perishing through want.

4. *And stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;*

It was, as I have said, a time of danger, when war was at the gates, but the people were so careless that they lived as if peace were established forever, and the enemy could never touch them, their expenditure was at a high rate for self-indulgence, and for that only.

5. *That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instrument of music, like David;*

But not for the same purpose as David played and sang, his instruments of music were used for spiritual solace and the worship of God, but these people set their wits to work to find out how their music might inflame their lusts, and be a vehicle for the expression of their lascivious desires.

6. *That drink wine in bowls,—*

For seldom can a careless man crown the edifice of his sin without indulging in drunkenness, he must have the sensual delight that he finds in "the flowing bowl."

6. *And anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*

It is not wrong for a person, to whom God has given much of the good things of this life, to enjoy them fitly and reasonably. The sin of these people consisted in the fact that, when others were afflicted, they took that opportunity to indulge themselves in all the delights of the flesh, and when God's rod was being used for chastisement, they went on with their sinful mirth to show how little they cared about it.

Probably I am addressing some who have, at this very moment, a sore sickness in the house, or it may be that a beloved wife is scarcely cold in her grave, or a dear child has only just sobbed itself into its death-sleep, yet the survivors are running after amusements, and pleasures, and follies, more wildly

than ever, as if to hush the voice of conscience, and to forget the strokes of God's rod. Oh, that this very solemn chapter might convey a warning message to them!

7. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

Whenever God does come forth to execute judgment upon the ungodly, He will first pick out those who have defied Him the most. Those who have the proudest spirit and the hardest heart shall be the first to feel the strokes of His rod.

8. The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

The next chapter shows that, even when God was very angry with the wicked, there was still wonderful power in prayer.

Amos Chapter 7. Verse 1-3. *Thus hath the Lord GOD shown unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: it shall not be, saith the LORD.*

In a vision, the prophet saw the locusts or grasshoppers come to devour all the green things of the land—a very terrible visitation. If you have never seen it, you cannot realize how utterly bare everything is made after the visit of the locusts.

The prophet put up a vehement and earnest prayer, he cried, "O Lord God, forgive," and no sooner was the intercession offered than the Lord said, "It shall not be." Thus the impending judgment was turned away.

4-6. Thus hath the Lord GOD shown unto me: and behold, the Lord GOD called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord GOD, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The LORD repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD.

This time, the prophet saw the fire devouring the land—perhaps the fire of war, which casts its blazing brand upon peaceful dwellings. This fire, however, was something worse than that, for the very deep itself seemed to be licked up by tongues of flame, and the prophet, in hearty sympathy with the afflicted people, cried again as he had done before, and the answer came, "This also shall not be, saith the Lord GOD." This ought to encourage you who are the King's remembrancers to make use of the position in which His grace has placed you, and to cry earnestly to Him to turn away His wrathful hand, and have pity upon sinners. God grant that many of us may have such an intercessory spirit as that of Amos the herdsman-prophet!

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